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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 000124

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MASS](#) [KPKO](#) [NI](#) [IV](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: CHAMBAS SAYS DISCORD AND LETHARGY HINDERS  
ECOWAS EFFORTS ON COTE D'IVOIRE

REF: A. DAKAR 98

[B](#). DAKAR 151

[C](#). LOME 26

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER FOR REASONS 1.5  
(B) AND (D).

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: During a January 8 conversation with Ambassador Jeter, ECOWAS Executive Secretary Chambas acknowledged ECOWAS diplomatic efforts in Cote d'Ivoire had lost steam due to ECOWAS Chairman Wade's erratic statesmanship, the lethargy of President Gbagbo and lack of focus of Togolese leader Eyadema in his role as mediator between the GOCI and the MPC. Chambas believed France originally hoped its call for a Paris Summit would roust ECOWAS from inaction. When ECOWAS leaders failed to respond, the French decided to proceed with the Summit. Chambas noted President Obasanjo had signaled thumbs down on deploying Nigerian peacekeepers on Ivorian soil; Chambas hoped Obasanjo would play a more active diplomatic role now that he had secured his party's renomination. Chambas did not believe member-states would commit additional soldiers to allow ECOWAS to increase the size of the proposed peacekeeping force. END SUMMARY.

[2](#). (C) During a January 8 dinner conversation at the Ambassador's residence, ECOWAS Executive Secretary Mohammed Ibn Chambas shared his views on the Ivorian peace process. According to Chambas, dissonance among ECOWAS Heads of State was severely impeding the organization's efforts to forge a diplomatic solution and to get a peacekeeping force on the ground. Chambas particularly criticized ECOWAS Chairman Wade. Chambas said the Chairman's penchant for off-the-cuff statements confused and irritated Wade's colleagues. Because Wade was the ECOWAS Chairman, his statements were perceived to be official policy when in fact they were no more than his private musings. Wade's most recent transgression was to call for a UN peacekeeping force. Chambas said that Wade's call for the "blue helmets" not only came as a surprise but it also complicated ongoing efforts to coordinate the deployment of an ECOWAS force.

[3](#). (C) Chambas contended Wade's unilateralism had undermined the Contact Group and Eyadema's efforts as mediator. At the December 15 summit in Kara, President Obasanjo took Wade to task for being a lone ranger and not using his position as ECOWAS Chairman to lead and coordinate with his colleagues. Obasanjo criticized Wade for being less than supportive of Eyadema's efforts, noting that Wade's public statements questioning the utility of the Lome mediation had humiliated Eyadema needlessly and that poor relationship between the two leaders most active in the peace process was impeding progress. Obasanjo also asserted that Wade had stepped out of line when, at the beginning of the crisis, he sent his Foreign Minister to Abidjan with an alternative peace plan almost immediately after the Contact Group had left. Obasanjo chided Wade for following this dismal precedent for a relationship with the Contact Group. When the Heads of State reached Abidjan, Obasanjo continued his blunt diplomacy. At their airport meeting, he told Gbagbo, "you have a problem and your problem is us!"

[4](#). (C) Chambas had hoped that Obasanjo's intervention at Kara signaled the Nigerian's more active engagement; he also hoped it would push Wade and Eyadema to mend their rift. Unfortunately neither has happened. Enmeshed in the business of his hard-fought presidential re-nomination, Obasanjo forgot Cote d'Ivoire. Because Obasanjo was not there to scold them and with no other ECOWAS leader to fill that void, Wade and Eyadema regressed to their relationship of cold indifference with occasional antagonism. Now that Obasanjo has secured his party renomination, Chambas hoped Obasanjo might devote more time to Cote d'Ivoire. If so, he expected the Nigerian leader to continue his efforts to

bring peace among the ECOWAS leaders, seeing the end of their competition as a precursor to ECOWAS playing a sufficiently constructive role in the peace process.

15. (C) Chambas felt Wade's insistence on having a "global" peace agreement between the GOCI and the three rebel groups before deploying a peacekeeping force was handicapping his efforts. He believed the fighting had to stop before real negotiations on a political solution could begin. While Senegal has deployed a 21-man headquarters unit and the French are transporting Senegal's 170-man combat team to CDI, it remains to be seen whether Wade will allow Senegalese soldiers to actively participate in monitoring operations without a formal agreement.

16. (C) Emphasizing that Wade was not totally responsible for the sub-region's inertia, Chambas claimed that Eyadema was ill suited for the role of mediator. Eyadema did not grasp that time was of the essence and that bringing peace grew more difficult with each passing day. Instead, Eyadema was content to keep the talks on the slow track, at one point forecasting the talks could last months. Eyadema reveled in the press coverage and attention; meetings were often replete with protocol and frills but short on substance. The Togolese leader seemed to be using the meeting as a vehicle to enhance his domestic image rather than forge genuine progress toward an Ivoirien peace.

17. (C) Chambas believed Gbagbo suffered from similar desultoriness. Gbagbo did not understand that delay advantaged the rebels not Abidjan. The longer the rebels controlled the North the more they could consolidate power, the more accustomed to leadership they would become. Their willingness to cede control would diminish as a function of time. If the current situation persists, the de facto partition of Cote d'Ivoire could become an accomplished fact. For instance, Chambas noted that significant trade between the rebel-held areas and neighboring states was occurring. Chambas hoped Gbagbo would not let himself be captive to regime hard-liners who favored the military option; according to Chambas, Gbagbo needed to become more active in talking to the rebels and opposition political leaders to discuss the issues associated with national reconciliation and expanding the political space and participation.

18. (C) Chambas said that neither Malian President Toure nor Burkina's Campaore have been active players recently. Wanting to get involved, Toure had hosted the talks between the Gbagbo and Campaore; hopes that the talks would be the vehicle to begin a dialogue to resolve bilateral differences were quickly dashed; the talks rambled and were inconclusive. Toure blamed Gbagbo for letting a golden opportunity slip because he was unfocused and vague at the meeting. At least for now, Toure has decided not to waste more political capital on Gbagbo until the Ivorien shows more seriousness. Meanwhile Chambas surmised that Campaore is relatively comfortable since attention has shifted from him and accusations of complicity have dwindled.

19. (C) Chambas expressed his hope that the Paris peace talks would prove fruitful. He believed the only way to find a political solution to the crisis was to bring all of the important actors to the table. Specifically, he noted that former President Bedie, former Prime Minister Ouattara, and General Guei's political heir, presumably his son, must be included for the process to be worthwhile.

110. (C) Chambas did not expect member states to increase their troop contributions at this time. He said the force commander, Senegalese Brigadier General Papa Khalil Fall, and his staff were planning for 1,300 troops. Chambas discounted rumors of a Senegal augmentation, stating that his latest information was that Senegal would not deploy more than 250 soldiers.

111. (C) Chambas further noted that Nigerian soldiers would not be joining the ECOWAS force any time soon. Obasanjo had decided against sending troops due to domestic political considerations. His opponents would make it a campaign issue and opposition in the National Assembly would try to block his request. (NOTE: The Nigerian constitution requires that Obasanjo seek Assembly approval for the deployment. END NOTE.) Chambas said the GON could not seriously consider deploying troops to Cote d'Ivoire until after the April elections.

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112. (C) Despite Wade's erratic performance, Chambas thought Wade would be re-elected as Chairman at the ECOWAS Summit later this month. The rotation should go to an Anglophone country and Gambia's Jammeh had been lobbying for the position. Jammeh visited Obasanjo in December to ask for his support. Chambas said Obasanjo's response fell far short of an endorsement with Obasanjo simply telling the Gambian he was not opposed to Jammeh seeking the Chairmanship. Chambas did not think Jammeh would garner much support and felt Presidents Kufuor and Kabbah would be better choices if Wade's return somehow was blocked. Liberia's Taylor was out of the question. Chambas said, however, that Kufuor would not lobby for the position but would serve if drafted.

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TROUBLE IN TOGO  
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113. (C) Finally, the discussion turned to recent events in Togo. Chambas was troubled by the recent change to Togo's constitution to allow Eyadema another term in office (REF C). He commented that over the course of the last year, Eyadema had been signaling that he had no intention of leaving office at the end of his term. Chambas worried that failure to include the Togolese opposition in the political process would put Togo on the same path as Cote d'Ivoire.

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COMMENT  
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114. (C) Chambas is an old friend of the Ambassador's. This was a relaxed evening and he was at ease. Chambas provided an interesting and very candid reading of the internal frictions plaguing ECOWAS Heads of State and their efforts in Cote d'Ivoire. Implicit in his analysis was that he was not in a position to stop the internecine squabbling. He seemed to think that Obasanjo, if sufficiently engaged, was best placed to serve this function. We agree. The upcoming ECOWAS summit will be important. Without a truce between the ECOWAS leader, they will continue to squabble and their disaccord will hamper the Ivoirien process.  
JETER